



# Memorandum

**TO:** NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES  
AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

**FROM:** Jon Cicirelli

**SUBJECT: REPORT ON SUSTAINABLE  
PARK MAINTENANCE**

**DATE:** February 25, 2019

Approved

Date

3/7/2019

**COUNCIL DISTRICT: ALL**

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Accept the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services' report on Sustainable Park Maintenance.

## **OUTCOME**

This report provides the Neighborhood Services and Education Committee with updates on park maintenance operations, including 2018 Park Condition Assessment results.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Department strives to ensure the proper maintenance and operation of more than 200 City parks and open spaces, and to provide opportunities for residents and visitors to play, learn, and socialize. To this end, maintenance service for the City's parks system includes:

- Grounds maintenance such as turf maintenance, tree maintenance, and landscaping;
- Custodial and janitorial services, including litter and refuse collection;
- Landscape rehabilitation;
- Repairs to equipment, such as irrigation systems and playgrounds; and,
- Special event services, including preparation, event set-up, tear-down and clean-up.

The Department regularly monitors parks, trails, and facility conditions using various data sources, including basic maintenance inspections conducted by staff, resident reports submitted to the Park Concerns email and hotline, reports submitted by other City departments, and extensive annual Park Condition Assessments (PCAs). The PCAs are a point-in-time evaluation of various park features, such as turf appearance, picnic areas and playgrounds, which are assessed and assigned a point score based on the criteria defined in *Attachment A*. Staff aggregates the points assigned to individual features of a park to calculate an overall average

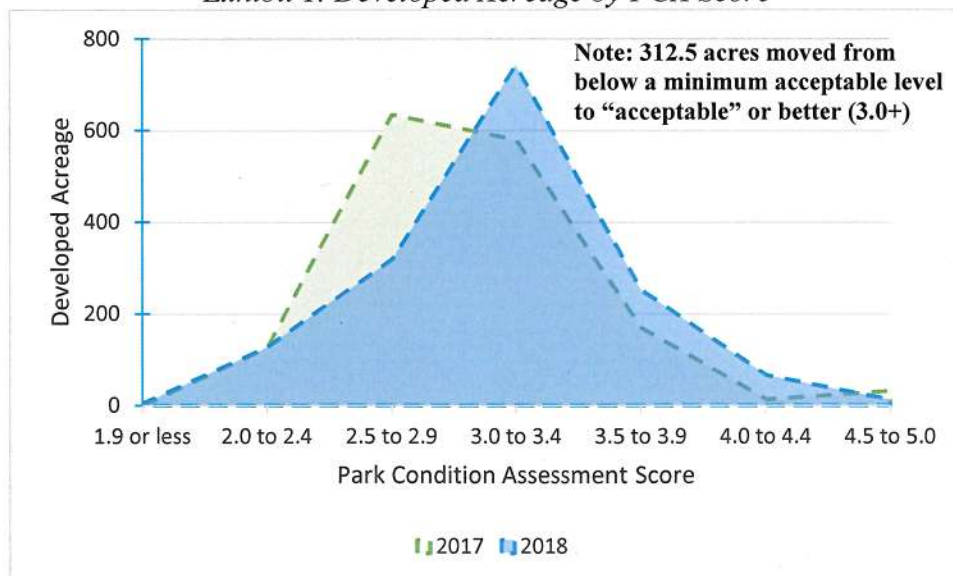
PCA score for a park. Compiled in the summer, staff's PCA scores reflect the previous fiscal year's level of service (i.e., 2018 PCAs record the condition of a park in summer 2018, which is the result of the service a park received during 2017-2018.)

Staff retrieves service delivery data for each park from the Department's Business Intelligence database and analyzes them along with the park's rating. Individual park service levels will differ due to variations in size, complexity, usage levels, and funding allocations; however, a review of Business Intelligence data indicates minimum service levels are not being met given current demand and resources. Despite efficiency enhancements, current efforts cannot mitigate the decline of park conditions at existing resource levels.

## **ANALYSIS**

Based on the 2018 assessment, the City's parks are in "acceptable" condition, earning an average cumulative score of 3.3.<sup>1</sup> This score is the same as that recorded for 2017. On a per-park basis, 49 percent of park PCA scores increased, 42 percent decreased, and 9 percent did not change. *Exhibit 1* below displays the number of acres by PCA score for 2017 and 2018. In considering this graph, it is important to note that, although the average PCA score remained at 3.3, the Department increased the acreage in the "acceptable" or better range (3.0+), reducing the amount of acreage under the "acceptable" 3.0 threshold by 41 percent, from 761.8 acres in 2017 to 449.3 in 2018. Staff attributes this positive change to the addition of 9.0 FTE maintenance positions added in the 2017-2018 Adopted Operating Budget, and to the Department's success in reducing its vacancy rates among parks maintenance classifications.

*Exhibit 1. Developed Acreage by PCA Score*



<sup>1</sup> The Department defines "acceptable" as a score of 3.0 or better on a scale of 1.0 – 5.0, with a perfect score of 5.0 reflecting a new or like-new park or park feature. In this context, a park with a score of "acceptable" may adequately serve the community's needs at present, but may also require a higher level of care and service to maintain the current PCA score in the future.

The overall PCA score distribution above is influenced by the condition of particular park assets, including playgrounds, tot-lots, drinking fountains, landscape beds, turf appearance, etc. There is a strong correlation between the overall age of the parks and the conditions of those assets. Looking forward to 2019-2020, the Department has already identified approximately 12 playgrounds and/or tot lot sites that should be renovated or replaced in accordance with recommended replacement schedules and safety standards. As the renovating and/or replacing of assets, including these playgrounds and/or tot lots, become prioritized per their PCA score, the Department identifies existing Capital and Operating funds to complete the projects.

In addition to assessing the City's overall parks system rating, the Department also evaluates the trail system and facilities individually<sup>2</sup>. The City's trails system was determined to have an average PCA score of 3.3 in 2018 (the same as that for the parks system, in general). In considering this score, it should be noted that trails serve a dual role as both recreation and active transportation corridors. For this reason, the maintenance services required to achieve and maintain "acceptable" conditions for trails tend to be more intensive than routine park maintenance. This is the case because higher usage rates lead to rapid deterioration and more frequent facility repairs and replacements. For example, last year's Trail Count documented that commuters comprised 40 percent of users on the Guadalupe River Trail. Due to this high daily mixed use, the Department established a desired condition assessment goal of 4.0 for trails based on the need to repair and maintain pavement, maintain safety signs, stripe lanes, and provide regular trail patrols. Given the City's budget priorities, ensuring the resources necessary to maintain trails in safe, useable condition for the public means that other park maintenance needs may not receive the same resource allocation.

Each year, the Department evaluates the conditions of facilities that it maintains, including library grounds, community center grounds, and civic grounds. For 2018, these facilities had an overall PCA score of 3.3, with approximately 82 percent of sites rating above the "acceptable" level of 3.0 (versus 72 percent in 2017, respectively).

### **Successes and Challenges**

The number of parks receiving a score below "acceptable" dropped from 63 in 2017 to 53 in 2018. As noted earlier, staff attributes this success to the addition of 9.0 FTE park maintenance staff in 2017-2018, the Department's ability to reduce vacancy rates for maintenance classifications, and the implementation of various operational efficiencies.

Regardless, many older parks are seeing the need for additional capital investments as they age. The attention needed to maintain older parks detracts staff attention from other higher-scored parks and adversely offsets any improvements that newer facilities might have on the overall PCA score. In 2018-2019, the deferred maintenance infrastructure backlog of capital repair needs for parks is estimated at \$332.4 million versus the \$292.5 million estimated in 2017-2018.

---

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that the trail system and facilities receive their own PCA scores. These individual scores do not affect the overall parks PCA score, and vice versa.

Despite the Department's recent ability to maintain the same system-wide PCA score from one year to the next, staff faces persistent and significant challenges to maintaining an acceptable rating of the City's parks system in the future. The growth in the size of the park system and the parallel growth in the Department's infrastructure backlog (due to aging) continue to challenge efforts to mitigate decreases in older facilities' PCA scores.

In line with staff's efforts to keep up with the maintenance demands of a growing and aging parks system, the Department is committed to advancing environmental, economic, and social practices that enhance quality of life and promote responsible management of resources. As such, the Department continues to seek near-term solutions to immediate parks maintenance issues, while taking into account the broader implications of how its approach to operations and maintenance will impact future generations. A few of these efforts are highlighted below.

#### *Success #1: Staffing Stabilization*

As noted in the Mayor's June 2017 Budget Message, vacancies have affected park maintenance, as well as funding cuts.<sup>3</sup> While incremental steps have been taken to add the resources needed to support such a large park system, including the addition of 9.0 FTE of park maintenance positions in the 2017-2018 budget, the Department continues to face other operational challenges that come with managing a large staffing model, including how best to address large volumes of ongoing recruitment needs.

To address these issues, in partnership with the Human Resources Department, the Department continues to prioritize hiring to fully leverage its budgeted staffing resources. The Department has been successful, having reduced the parks maintenance vacancy rate from 18 percent at the beginning of 2017-2018, to 14 percent in Spring 2018, and now to 8 percent in 2018-2019, year-to-date. While regular attrition and turnover continues (promotions, retirements, etc.), the number of park maintenance hours is increasing, and park conditions are anticipated to stabilize, although infrastructure will continue to decline without significant capital investment (pavement, playgrounds, bathrooms, etc).

#### *Success #2: Best Practices, Data Usage and Standard Implementation*

Through the PCA process, the Department is identifying immediate areas of need within its parks system. In 2017, drinking fountains, landscaped beds, and youth and tot lot playgrounds were among the assets that had the most PCA scores ranking below the 3.0 "acceptable" threshold. As a result, staff focused on these specific features to stem a decline in park PCA scores. These efforts resulted in the following assets moving from "unacceptable" ratings, to the "acceptable" range, or higher:

- 14 drinking fountain systems in parks;
- 41 youth and tot lot playgrounds; and,
- 5 landscaped bed improvements.

---

<sup>3</sup> [https://sanjose.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view\\_id=&event\\_id=2688&meta\\_id=639247](https://sanjose.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=&event_id=2688&meta_id=639247)

With the 2018 assessment revealing that these three assets continue to receive a significant number of low scores, staff remains dedicated to addressing these issues. In particular, in Park District 1, which maintains parks in parts of Council Districts 2, 9, and 10, staff implemented a pilot program to help remedy these concerns. Staff instituted a maintenance standards program that ensures the weekly mowing of parks, the evaluation of park route efficiencies, and the tracking and timely resolution of corrective work orders. With these efforts in place, Park District 1 has seen a 35 percent reduction in park concerns reported by the public since the pilot program began on August 6, 2018. Due to the success of this pilot program, the Department is creating a deployment strategy to implement these standards across all eight park maintenance districts. This rollout is anticipated to begin in late Fall 2019. These new standards are a cost effective approach to utilizing existing resources to maximize results.

*Success #3: Identifying Areas of Efficiencies*

The Department continues to identify efficiencies that lead to increases in direct service hours, decreases in staff and equipment downtime, and the general ability to maximize the efficient use of resources. These efforts include using innovative technologies, such as smart meters to minimize the use of irrigation water; the use of GPS units on mowers and vehicles to minimize travel and downtime; and, the deployment of specialized teams that can resolve high-number, high-energy, high-expertise field issues in a way that is targeted and expedient. The Department aims to continue these efforts while identifying and exploring other efficiencies and best practices to enhance the quality of services to all locations within its parks system.

*Success #4: Parks Rehabilitation "Strike Team"*

The Strike Team is part of a three-year pilot program funded by the Subdivision Park Trust Fund, which was created to address infrastructure backlog projects within the specific nexus of the developments for which fees were collected.

The Strike Team has proven to be an efficient means to address the growing infrastructure backlog, completing 91 percent of its projects on time and on or below budget. Funding for the Strike Team is scheduled to end December 31, 2019. The Department is proposing to extend the Strike Team through June 2020 as part of the 2019-2020 budget development process. In the interim, staff prioritize projects based on PCA scores, locations where Park Trust Fund monies are available, locations where other minor capital projects are planned, and projects requiring immediate repairs to ensure health and safety.

*Challenge #1: Water Conservation and Rates*

Increases in water rates will continue to have an impact on the quality of parks. In 2017-2018, the Department's water consumption was 69 percent of the pre-drought level in 2013-2014 due to conservation efforts related to the drought. However, over the same time, the cost per unit for water doubled. Staff anticipates water rates to continue to rise for the foreseeable future. Staff is partnering with the Information Technology Department to create a centralized smart

irrigation system to cost-effectively monitor and manage irrigation at parks. By utilizing weather data, centrally programming controllers, and receiving alerts when problems arise, staff anticipates the smart irrigation controllers will save 10 to 30 percent in water use.

*Challenge #2: Efforts in Integrated Pest Management*

In addition to water conservation, Integrated Pest Management is an ecosystem-based strategy that emphasizes the use of multiple pest control methods, prioritizing non- or low-chemical techniques to manage pests, including weeds. In 2018, the Department piloted an Integrated Pest Management approach in Park Districts 1, 2, and 3 (Council Districts 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9 and 10) in which staff used mechanical traps and less toxic chemicals, versus traditional chemical controls in pest management. As a result of this effort, staff determined that, in many cases, pest eradication using these methods required either four times the amount of labor and/or less toxic chemicals to achieve the same results as pest management using traditional landscape chemicals. Regardless of the additional time and resources needed to implement ecologically friendly methods, the Department is intent on mitigating the environmental impacts of pest management in conjunction with its efforts to address these issues ethically and humanely. To this end, the Department continues to pursue alternative solutions amid the community's growing concern over use of traditional chemical methods and their impacts on the population and environment.

*Challenge #3: Efforts in Protecting San José's Community Forest*

San José's community forest is one of the only infrastructure assets that continually increases in value and benefit to the community. The Department has been able to maintain its share of the City's overall community forest but much more needs to be done to maintain this parks system asset. For instance, it is estimated that the City has over 35,000 trees within its parks system. However, the budget to maintain all the trees at parks, community centers and other civic grounds is \$150,000. This funding covers everything from emergency removals to routine trimming, pruning, and scheduled removal of trees. Though the Department deploys its contracted tree vendor to provide services citywide, the current levels of service are inadequate to address the full breadth of needs presented by such a large community forest. To illustrate this point, with the existing budget allocation of \$150,000, each of the approximately 35,000 trees receive an allocation of \$4.30 on an annual basis to provide routine and emergency tree care. Though the Department is aware that this level of funding and care is inadequate, it is unable to identify the true need due to lack of data on its tree inventory. Currently, the Department is partnering with the Department of Transportation to procure consultant services to perform a tree inventory survey outlining the quantity, location, species and condition of the City's community forest. A Request for Proposals for these services is anticipated to be awarded in late spring, and the survey completed by December 2019. This, in turn, will support the procurement of consultant services to develop a comprehensive forestry management plan, which will be based on the survey results from the initial tree survey and assessments. If implemented, this plan could result in a strategy to identify an adequate level of funding to create healthy park forests, safe park experiences for visitors, reduced greenhouse gases, and abundant habitat for wildlife.



#### *Challenge #4: Efforts in Sports Field Renovations*

Sports field renovations ensure that the 42 natural turf sports fields in the City inventory are safe and in proper condition for quality sports play. Annually, these fields provide places where more than 40,000 youth and adults can participate in healthy physical sports activities, enjoy friendly competition, and learn the values of good sportsmanship. In addition to recorded field reservations, many residents and visitors use the park fields in their neighborhood and throughout the City for family recreation and “pickup” games that do not require a reservation. Frequent usage paired with a lack of extended rest periods and, as previously mentioned, pest management issues, it has been a challenge to ensure that all sports fields are fully and thoroughly renovated on a consistent rotating and scheduled basis. The Department prioritizes the renovations of these fields based on the conditions recorded during the PCA process and by input from leagues utilizing the fields.

#### *Current Efforts and Approaches to Date*

The Department aims to be a national leader in Parks and Recreation, and in order to achieve this goal, it acknowledges continued improvements are necessary. Recent and current efforts to make park maintenance more financially sustainable include:

- Outsourcing the maintenance of small parks and restrooms;
- Creating partnerships and strategic alliances;
- Implementing operational efficiencies with technology;
- Improving and/or establishing of best-practice maintenance standards; and,
- Identifying potential alternative funding sources.

While the efforts listed above are steps in the right direction, additional investments in infrastructure and ongoing maintenance are necessary to minimize decline and sustain the City’s park system at the current PCA level of 3.3. While the level of service currently delivered in the parks system has resulted in incremental increases and changes, there are still many areas of opportunity and growth that can be explored to improve the system as a whole.

### **EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP**

The Department will continue to conduct regular Park Condition Assessments, analyze resulting data, and adjust resources and operations where feasible and appropriate.

### **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

This memorandum will be posted on the City’s website for the March 14, 2019 Neighborhood Services and Education Committee meeting.

February 25, 2019

**Subject: Report on Sustainable Park Maintenance**

Page 8

### **COORDINATION**

This memorandum was coordinated with the City Manager's Budget Office, City Attorney's Office, and the Department of Transportation.

### **COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION/INPUT**

This memorandum was heard at the Parks and Recreation Commission meeting on February 6, 2019.

### **CEQA**

Not a project, File No. PP17-009, Staff Reports, Assessments, Annual Reports, and Informational Memos that involve no approvals of any City action.

/s/

JON CICIRELLI

Acting Director of Parks,

Recreation and Neighborhood Services

For questions, please contact Justin Long, Deputy Director, at (408) 535-3570.

#### **Attachments:**

1. Attachment A: 2018 Park Condition Assessment Criteria
2. Attachment B: 2018 Park Condition Assessment Results
3. Attachment C: PCA Per Council District